

An interview with William Ridge

(1)

WILLIAM RIDGE

An Interview Conducted by

Martin Plascak

February 23, 1981

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DATE

NARRATOR DATA SHEET

Name of narrator: William Ridge

Address: 2209 Putnam, Terre Haute, IN Phone: 234-8329

Birthdate: 11-27-1893 Birthplace: Pikesville, IN

Length of residence in Terre Haute: 54 years

Education: 8th grade

Occupational history: Terre Haute & Indianapolis Traction Company
from 1917 to 1959--42 years.

Special interests, activities, etc. Retired Railroad Assn.

Major subject(s) of interview: Streetcars, interurbans,
early transportation

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Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
02/23/81	1:30 P.M.	Mr. Ridge's residence	Martin Plascak

8204477

WILLIAM RIDGE

Tape 1

February 23, 1981

William Ridge residence, 2209 Putnam Street, Terre Haute, IN

INTERVIEWER: Martin Plascak

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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MP: This is an oral history project with William Ridge, 86 years old, an employee of the Terre Haute, Indianapolis & Evansville Traction Company for 45 years. This oral history interview is taking place on the 23rd of February, 1981, at 1:30 in the afternoon at the home of William Ridge. And I'm Martin Plascak.

Mr. Ridge, where were you born?

RIDGE: In the southern part of Indiana down in Pikesville, Indiana.

MP: And you're 86 years old?

RIDGE: Yes, sir.

MP: Tell us something about your parents.

RIDGE: Well, my dad was Thomas Ridge. He was an old Kentuckian. He was born and raised in Kentucky. And my mother's name was Eliza Ridge; she was raised down in the southern part of Indiana. And my Granddaddy Foster was an old steamboat engineer. He used to go New Orleans to Memphis, steamboat corn . . . him and his brother.

MP: What about your education?

RIDGE: Well, I never went to high school. I went to about 8th grade of the common school . . . was all the school I got.

MP: When were you married, sir?

RIDGE: Well, I've been married more than once.

MP: Um hm.

RIDGE: I married the first time in Vincennes. Her name was Ruth Price. Then we separated. Then I come up to Terre Haute and I married again -- another gal.

RIDGE: She was from Washington, Indiana. Her name was Lou Johnson. We lived together for several years and we separated. Then I married a gal by the name of Alberta Proffit. Ol' Bill Proffit -- everybody knew him. He was a carpenter and used to work for Oakley. And finally, we was living here then when she took to the ol' guy next door -- ol' Finley Coons. He run off and left his wife (she was an invalid) and they divorced. And they got married, him and her /Alberta/ did, and moved down on South 4th Street -- 4th and Washington. That's where she lives yet.

And then this gal I got now, she's from North Terre Haute. She was raised around North Terre Haute, and we've been married . . .

MRS. R: Forty-five years last December the 23rd.

MP: Forty-five years and how many children do you have?

RIDGE: Three.

MP: Three children. What are their names?

MRS. R: Billy, and Jack, and Ruth Ann.

RIDGE: Ruth Ann lives right across the street over here in this house. They bought that property over there off . . .

MRS. R: Chenault.

RIDGE: Chenaults.

MP: And your son Bill is a former policeman, and he is now the street commissioner, isn't he?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: Mr. Ridge, let's talk about your job career now.

How did you happen to get started with the old Terre Haute . . .

RIDGE: Traction Company.

MP: . . . Traction Company. I believe your first job was with the streetcars was it not?

RIDGE: That's right. Yeah, I started there on the streetcars. They was payin' 17¢ an hour then, here 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. And then that's how I come to go over on the interurban. The interurban was payin' 22¢ an hour, so I went over on the interurban and worked that. I worked Clinton, Paris (we used to haul a lot of freight out of Paris) and I worked at freight run from here to Indianapolis for a good while.

MP: How long did you work with the streetcars in Terre Haute? Do you remember?

RIDGE: You mean on . . .

MP: On the streetcars.

RIDGE: Oh, I expect I put in 10 years.

MP: Can you remember the dates? When was that?

RIDGE: Well, it was back in . . . I come here in /1917. And I was working North 19th up there in the . . . got shot there at 13th and Locust with a colored fellow. He got on at 13th and Wabash, was drunk, and he started talking vulgar language. I asked him to cut it out or get off so he went to the back end and sat down until I got to 13th and Locust. And when I got to 13th and Locust, he come walking up there and grabbed ahold of me and said, "Well, you son-of-a-bitch, I ain't afraid of you." And I just turned around and opened the door and knocked him out the door. Well, when I knocked him out the door, why he crawled over to that . . . there was a grocery store then there. That's where that pizza place is now. But he crawled over to that store, slid his back up the wall and pulled out a .38, /and/ started in shootin'.

So, he shot three times. The first time just missed my head and went over and hit the glass up above and went over and went in the drugstore glass, went through the transom at a drugstore and went inside, fell down on a table, and spun around and scared the people all to death in there. So, when he started in shootin', the people toward the back end of the streetcar just knocked the back door down and run for that drugstore. And they got in there -- several of them -- and there was one colored fellow

RIDGE: in there. He was scared as bad as they was. He was tryin' to get in the clear, too.. When he went a-runnin' in there, why they thought this was the guy that done the shootin' so they started turning over the tables and everything else, trying to hide. And the druggist got that stopped and slowed it down.

So, by that time, why, he shot me. He shot me through the door. He stood over there and shot back at the door. And I'd told the passengers, I said, "Now, get in the clear. He's gonna start in shooting." I'd seen him pull that gun out. So, he hit me on this side. The first shot just hit that bottom rib; and, boy, when a bullet hits a bone, it just . . . I don't know, it paralyzes. It just . . . I fell and as I fell, there was a little Jew sittin' there in the front seat, and he was getting up, trying to get out of there. And just as he got up on his feet, that nigger shot me. Why, I fell and I fell down and knocked this little Jew down on the floor and fell on top of him . . . or side of him. Then he run around the front end and shot down through the front end of the car -- just went down between our heads. So, he run then and old Mike Casey, a detective we had here . . . ol' Mike went up there that night at 11 o'clock . . . or it was 11 o'clock when he come in. He went up there in the evening and talked with this 'ol woman and found out where he lived at. He told her what he was gonna do. He said, "Now, I'm gonna come in here and sit down. And I'm gonna stay. I'll keep that door locked." And he said, "I'm gonna sit here."

He said, "When he comes up and knocks on the door or says something," he said, "you just sit still. I'll let him in."

So ol' Mike got up (it was around 11 o'clock when this nigger come in). He knocked on the door. 'Ol Mike told her , he said, "Ask who's there?" So, she asked, "Who's there?" And he said, "It's me, honey. Let me in." So ol' Mike he just got up and unlocked the door. Throwed a gun in his face. He had this gun he shot me with and a pint of White Mule in his pocket when Mike got him.

But he'd shot a guy down in Kentucky. That's what

RIDGE: he was doin' up in here. They was a-huntin' for him. He shot a guy down in Kentucky with this same gun he shot me with.

MP: How'd the police know who it was?

RIDGE: Well, they know . . . I guess somebody told them what his name was and all about it because old Mike went right up there where he lived at, stayed until he got 'im.

MP: Do you remember the name?

RIDGE: The nigger's name? Ike Richards.

MP: And how'd that case turn out?

RIDGE: Well, he got 14 years in the penitentiary. They sent him 14 years to the pen, and I don't know /whether/ he come back here or not when he got out. You know, I never did see him any more.

MP: So, you were injured and taken to the hospital, I take it?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, I was shot -- two holes. I was shot twice. He shot me through there; hit that rib, as I say, and then he lowered the gun down and shot me right through the top part of the bowels.

MP: How long were you in the hospital?

RIDGE: Oh, I was in there, I expect, not over 30 days.

MP: And this happened on a streetcar at . . .

RIDGE: Yeah, at 13th and Locust.

MP: When, sir? What year? Do you remember?

RIDGE: No. I don't remember what year it was now. It was in the paper. There was a big piece in the paper. I . . .

Mom!

MP: Well . . .

RIDGE: Pardon me, I'll see if she might have that paper

RIDGE: in there. I had a piece of paper where he'd done it.

MP: All right, Mr. Ridge. Let's talk a little bit more about the streetcars.

How many streetcars were there in Terre Haute when you started working? Do you remember?

RIDGE: Well, there was South 17th, North 19th, North 8th, East Locust, South 7th, South 3rd; that's about all of them, I think.

MP: Do you remember what some of the schedules were? How often did they run?

RIDGE: Oh, they run -- back there then -- every . . . you could catch one every 15 /to/ 30 minutes.

MP: What about the fares?

RIDGE: Five cents.

MP: And was there a transfer then?

RIDGE: Yeah. They got a transfer. No extra charge for a transfer back there then. They gave you a transfer if you wanted to transfer to another streetcar.

MP: Where did the streetcars stop downtown?

RIDGE: Well, of course, we had a station back there. It was the old ticket office, and interurbans they pulled around there. They had a yard around there. They pulled around there in that yard and would park. /They/ stayed there 'til they was needed again. They used to be . . . that yard used to be full of interurbans. Of course, once in a while we'd put a streetcar in there, if we had one we were gonna use or getting ready to take out. We used to take 'em out. They'd break down, and we'd take another car out to 'em. That used to be my job, too, at the old interurban station. I used to take cars out, bring the crippled ones in . . . give 'em to the guys on the route and bring the crippled ones back to the garage, the barn.

MP: And where were the barns located?

RIDGE: Out East Wabash, out there at . . . aaw, it's about . . . (voice drops to almost a whisper) let's see. What the hell street is that? It was on the north side of Wabash right across from where that there . . .

MRS. R: (low voice in the background) . . . where the old dance used to be out there . . . what was the name of that?

MP: Out near Wassell's?

MRS. R: Yeah.

MP: . . . and across from Abel and Creal, I believe.

MRS. R: Yeah, yeah. Right in there.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: Well, I believe one of those old car barn buildings is still standing, is it not?

RIDGE: Yeah, I think it's still there. I think that old one is still there, that they . . . what did they have?

MRS. R: Some kind of . . . /they/ had glass /or/ somethin' . . . made glass of some kind in there for a while.

MP: Mr. Ridge, you worked in the car barn, did you? Is that where the maintenance on the streetcars . . .

RIDGE: Yeah, that's where they done all kind of work in there. They had blacksmiths, and they had car builders and car repairs and everything. They had a private shop there that they worked on.

MP: What else did you do with the streetcar company?

RIDGE: Well, of course, as I say, I worked interurbans; and I worked on the snow plow when there used to come a big snow here. We'd have snows. When I first come up here, I started with ol' Bill . . . what was his name, mom? That run that there . . . had that place over there where he had all kinds of stuff? Bill . . .

MRS. R: Oh . . . he lived in Seelyville then.

RIDGE: Yeah. He had a place over there at Seelyville.
He had . . .

MRS. R: And his son. Wasn't it his son had that big . . .

RIDGE: Airplane?

MRS. R: . . . airplane place in Brazil?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MRS. R: Oh. What was his name?

MP: Did you ever . . . What was the crew of a
streetcar? I believe there was a motorman . . .

RIDGE: Motorman and a conductor.

MP: Were you ever a motorman or a conductor?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. I was both; I worked both ends.

MP: On the streetcar?

RIDGE: On the streetcars, yeah.

MP: What'd the motorman do?

RIDGE: Well, he was up there in front, and he had a
vestibule up there that he stayed in, and nobody was
supposed to be up there with him. But he run the
streetcar and stopped it and picked up passengers
and started it and . . . It had nine points. You
pulled it around and you throwed it off like that.
You fed it back around, and you had nine points on
it when it was runnin' full force. And I've worked . . .
I've worked on that, not in the shop, but . . .

Oh, some of those ol' guys out on the line my
age now would . . . they'd have trouble, and I'd pull
up there on the switch, get off and go over there and
help 'em. I know there was an ol' guy that worked
up there . . . aaw, I can't think of his name; he
had a son that worked on a streetcar, too -- Ellis,
ol' man Ellis. He had a run ahead of me up there,
and I pulled up there at the switch, and he was down
at the end of the line. I seen that he was having

RIDGE: trouble, and I just went on . . . took my streetcar and went on down to him. And that had fingers in it. That motor had fingers in there that like that they come around and touched the other part of it, which give 'em more power. And I went up there and this ol' man Ellis has got one or two of these fingers bent down like that, and it wouldn't feed up any more. So, I just opened up the control box that had a lid on top, and I just took it off where you could see. And I seen what was the trouble, they was bent in like that. So, I just took and bent them back out where they belonged and straightened them up with these other points, fed her right up and went right on.

MP: What did the conductor do?

RIDGE: Well, he collected fares. He stayed on the back end there on them there closed cars. There was a fare box back there, and they'd get on, and he'd give 'em change. They'd drop whatever the fare was. Used to be a nickel, and then it got /to be/ 10 cents, then it raised /to/ 15. But . . .

MRS. R: But the conductor used to just collect the fares, Bill. They didn't have them /fare boxes/ then. And they rung 'em . . . had a cord they . . .

RIDGE: Oh, they had a summer car, sure. On a summer car, mama . . .

MP: Well, let's talk about that summer car in just a minute. But . . . so now we know a little bit about what the conductor and the motorman did.

How fast did these streetcars run?

RIDGE: Oh, they'd run (heh) . . . I expect 50 miles an hour. I don't know.

MP: Fifty miles an hour on city streets?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: How'd they operate? They were a . . . the streetcars hooked to a trolley line. How'd that work?

RIDGE: Well, that trolley went up there, and there was a wire that went along, and the trolley . . . they had a

RIDGE: split like that, and there was a wheel down here. And that wheel just rolled right on that wire. And it jumped off . . . when it jumped off, why, you'd have to go back there and get it and put it back on the wire.

MP: Who did that?

RIDGE: The conductor.

MP: How often did that happen?

RIDGE: Oh, a lot of times. I know one time, up /on/ North 6th Street, I was workin' the front end, and I had a conductor -- and he was an old man, too. What I mean is he'd been there several years, and he ought /to have/ had better sense. But his trolley jumped off and broke the rope. He got up there and caught a-hold of this wire and reached over like that and got a-hold of the trolley pole, and Christ, he was just . . . he was connected same as the other, and it like to killed him. He fell lose and fell down on the ground. But it burned both of his hands bad, but he never tried that any more. Christ, you take a-hold of that trolley pole and touch the wire, you've had it boy! There's a lot of shock there all over.

MP: So you had a lot of trouble with those trolley lines?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. They'd jump off lots.

MP: I understand also that the kids played . . .

RIDGE: Kids used to do that.

MP: What'd they do?

RIDGE: Well, they'd pull the . . . they'd come along behind, and if you slowed up enough, they could get a-hold of the rope (the rope hung down). The rope tied right here. Here's the car, and there was a thing there that you tied the end of that rope in. They left it loose like that there, and it had enough swing that it didn't pull off. But if that jumped off, why you could just reach through that back window back there and get a hold of that rope and pull it down and put it back on the wire and go again. But

RIDGE: sometimes the rope'd break. And then you had to get a-hold of the pole and pull it back.

But you could take a-hold of the pole, and it wouldn't do nothin' to you if you wasn't connected with nothin' else about the streetcar. But if you was connected to the wire . . . we killed a horse out there one time at 13th and Main /Wabash Avenue/. They used to have horses that pull these here wagons that fix trolleys. Like a trolley'd break, and you'd call 'em. Well, they'd come out there, and they had a high wagon. Oh, it was 'way high, and it was pulled by a horse. And they pulled a . . . one time we was there at 13th and Main at the . . . the wire broke right there, just around the corner. We called 'em, and they come out there, and they took and got this wire. /They/ tightened it up, hooked it on the end of the streetcar, and they was gonna back the streetcar up to tighten the slack in it. And they pulled it back and the wire broke in another place and a live end hit across that horse's back. It was just like shootin' him. Just as soon as it hit him, why, down he went. It killed him right there. He just straightened out. You could see his hoof was about that close to the rail, and you could just see that electricity runnin' from his foot backwards and forward on that rail.

MP: The old streetcars ran on tracks.

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: Were the tracks down the middle of the street?

RIDGE: Yeah. Right down the middle of the street.

MP: What'd the old streetcars look like?

RIDGE: Well, they was /a/ long streetcar with glass inside and had windows. It had windows inside Oh, I expect 8 windows, 10 windows on each side . . . oh, not that many. But there was about 8 of 'em on each side. Just like that window, only it was fixed in a different way. It was just one glass though; there was no two glasses. There was just one glass, then here'd be another glass, then another glass until the And the ends of them had glass in 'em.

MP: How many people did they seat?

RIDGE: Oh, you could seat 50 people on 'em.

MP: Were they all the same size?

RIDGE: No. There was bigger ones and little ones. Some of them, now, they had . . . they used to have there on South 7th and South 3rd big old double-truck cars. And they, of course, that was pretty good track on South 7th and 3rd both. That was their heavy route, that South 7th used to be. A lot of people would ride that of a morning. I used to be . . . I was inspector there for about a year, and I used to work down there at 7th and Hulman. I'd stay down there, and we had what we called "extras." We had two cars that run from 3rd and Wabash down to Hulman Street -- 7th and Hulman. And we'd space them in between cars. Like you was on one car down at the end, and I'd let you through. Then when you come through, I'd take this extra and put it there behind you -- a certain space, oh, three or four blocks apart -- so they wouldn't catch up with each other and bother the front car. /If it/ happened to be loaded down and the other car'd be nothing in it, why, we always tried to keep 'em in space. That's what an inspector was for. He was out there. If one was late, why you had to look /at/ your schedule and see where he belonged and wait until the other car come through and then put him in behind that other car, right behind that other car.

MP: Mr. Ridge, when you say, "double-truck," do you mean double-decker?

RIDGE: No. In the heads of 'em, we called 'em double-truck because they had two different sections and wheels in 'em. They had . . . like here would be four wheels -- two on a side -- or four on a side, I mean. No, two on a side. That was one truck, and then here's the back end of it. It'd be the same back there. They'd have four wheels back there.

MP: Was there such a thing as a double decker street-car in Terre Haute?

RIDGE: No.

MP: /They/ didn't have that?

RIDGE: No, we never had that.

MP: What were the differences between the winter and summer streetcars?

RIDGE: Well, these summer streetcars was open. They just had . . . you walked along . . . you had a running board run along here; and the conductor, he walked that running board and collected the fares. Like maybe you was up here at the front end, and people would get on there -- eight or ten people. You'd go back along, walkin' the runnin' board and took their fares along the runnin' board there.

MP: They were pretty popular, were they?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, we worked them in the summer time all the time. They was . . . a lot of people /would/ ride 'em. A lot of people liked them because they sat there and /would/ get the fresh air. And /they/ used to ride the Highland Lawn, lots on 'em. They'd just get on there and ride out there to the graveyard just for the airing.

MP: Did these streetcars derail very often? Jump the tracks?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, they jumped the track every so often.

MP: What would happen when . . . what would happen to the cars then?

RIDGE: Well, they'd . . . it's just accordin' to what happened when they jumped the track. Now, I had one one time comin' down the Highland Lawn hill, and I got down there just at the gate of the graveyard of the Calvary cemetery. That's the Catholic cemetery on the south side. And then Highland Lawn was up there further; it was on the north side. That was the Protestant cemetery. But down at that there Catholic cemetery there was a gate that went in there to go up in the graveyard. And there was a low joint there, and I had that ol' big 458. It was a big . . . we used it lots for interurban work. I was just boostin'. I never took it too much on runs, but it boost that like . . . Say the Indianapolis was late, and I'd have to take 'em in. The conductor would

RIDGE: have to take a car and take over there and take your passengers and bring on to Terre Haute and turn them around and put 'em back on their schedule. And that was done lots.

MP: What about . . . were there any serious accidents with the streetcars?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, they happened. There was accidents happened. A lot of cars run out in front of them, and they'd hit 'em. I know one case down there on South 7th. This guy was comin' west, and his mother was in the car there with him. And there at 7th and . . . right below Poplar Street . . . I'll think of it in a minute. He run out in front of the streetcar; and my motorman hit him and knocked this old lady, just the top part of her head off. Just . . . it was in them open cars there used to be that they had and it just had things that went up and held the top on. And when the car hit that, it throwed her over against one of these here rods that run up there, and just knocked the top of her head off. She was just sittin' up there in this seat with the whole top of her head off and got stopped. Got everything slowed down.

MP: So, the streetcars and the cars and the trucks collided every once in a while?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there was a lot of times. Ed Liggett, he run /the/ Clinton /line/ a whole lot. And ol' Ed Liggett had a record. I don't know, I think it was about 21 people he killed on that Clinton line up there -- that run out in front of him /and/ he hit 'em.

MP: That was not with a streetcar though was it?

RIDGE: No, that was an interurban.

MP. Um hm.

Did the streetcars run all night?

RIDGE: No. Twelve o'clock.

MP: They ran from . . . when did they start in the morning?

RIDGE: Started about 5 o'clock in the morning and run 'til 12 at night.

MP: So, they ran about 19 hours a day.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: Were there any weather problems that bothered the streetcar service? What would happen during a heavy snow?

RIDGE: Oh, well, we just took that snow plow and got out there and cleaned tracks then. We used to have what they called a snow plow and a sand car. Now, this sand car, I've worked it too.

MP: What did it do?

RIDGE: Well, it went along; and after it got the tracks swept, it went along and poured sand all along. It had a little thing under there that come down and . . . a little pipe on each side of this sand car we had full of sand. Like from that stove on over here, there was just a big thing that we filled that full of sand, kept it on both side of the . . . kept 'em full of sand. And we'd just go along there and turn the little thing, and that sand would pour right out along on the track . . . just pour on top of the track. And it kept it from . . . stopped slipping.

MP: But before that you went on the tracks with a snow plow. How did that work?

RIDGE: Well, it just . . . it was a broom, just a broom that went along and went right over the track, and it just swept that snow right off like that to one side.

MP: So, would there be any occasion when a heavy snow completely disrupted service and the streetcars didn't run?

RIDGE: Oh, no. We never got to where we couldn't run, but we got to where . . . Of course, as I say now, as soon as it snowed . . . as soon we seen it was gonna snow, they'd get that snow plow out and break track; and by the time things got started the next morning, why all the tracks would be cleared. As I

RIDGE: say, after that snow plow went along there and swept that snow off, why then that sand car come along and followed up. Come along and poured that sand all along that track there, thawed things out.

MP: Did you have any problem during a heavy rain?

RIDGE: No, rain never bothered us. The switches used to get full of water. I know one time (chuckles) up there at 3rd and Wabash there used to be a big switch at the turn. When you wanted to turn, why, South 3rd . . . or go east . . . go ahead west, why that switch you could throw it any way. It was an electric switch, and it's just accordin' . . . if you come up there with your power off, like you pulled up there so close to it and you knowed you'd go over it, you /d/ just throw your power off and go right on over it. But if you pulled up there and had your power on, why that ol' switch'd open up like that /and/ turn you to South 3rd.

And one time I was a-comin' up there and I was gonna go South 3rd, and there was a colored fellow ridin' a bicycle (laughs) along there, and he was just about even with the switch. /He/ had on a light suit, one of them white suits. And he was just about even with this switch (like here was the switch and here the colored fella was and I was back there) and I hit that switch and /slap of hands/ throwed it over like that, and it just throwed muddy water and all over him.

MP: (laughs)

RIDGE: . . . and he cussed.

MP: What would happen if oil or some kind of a jelly-type substance was splashed on the tracks? Wouldn't the cars slide if they hit their brakes or what?

RIDGE: Oh yeah.

MP: Did that ever happen?

RIDGE. Yeah, they used to . . . down Strawberry Hill . . . that's down South 3rd there, called Strawberry Hill. It's at Hulman Street. The end of it is down at . . . starts in there about a block, and kids used to go

RIDGE: down there . . . go down there and soap that track. Take . . . I guess it was soap. I don't know, they claimed it was soap. But they get a bar of soap and smear along on that track. And brother, you hit that, and you couldn't stop at all. /It/ caused me to hit a wagon down there one time that was goin' across Hulman Street on 3rd Street. He was goin' west, and at that time they had them there wagons that they haul this fertilizer in from the toilets. Open top, didn't have no top on it at all. /It/ just had a big iron tank there, and they'd fill that full and take it out to dump it. And this guy was goin' across down there, and they'd soaped that hill, and I hit it, and it was just like glass. As I say, there's no stoppin' it. The brakes wouldn't stop it or nothin' else. And he was going across the track, and I got down and then I hit him and I . . . It was in the summer time, and I had a summer car. It was all open. And I hit that wagon and throwed that stuff all out on me and on the front of that streetcar, and I was in the awfulest shape you ever seen. (laughs) My conductor, he like to laughed hisself to death. He said, "I know it's awful, but . . ." he said, and smell?! So I didn't do a damned thing. Only I told him, I said, "Get on that front end and don't let nobody on here." We didn't have no passengers on. I said, "And go back to the Arcade." That was the terminal station there. I had another uniform down there in the locker, so we went back down there and I pulled this uniform off and (oh, it was all messed all over) put on this clean uniform . . . took a bath and put on this clean uniform, and went back out and went to work. But it was a mess.

MP: I understand that the kids also liked to use to put . . . liked to put pennies and nickels (laughs) on the tracks, and nails.

RIDGE: No. They most of the time they'd get them there little railroad torpedoes. They was right in a bag about that big around. /They would/ take that and take a wire they had on each side of it. . . had a little wire. Well, it wasn't wire. It was some kind of a tin stuff like aluminum, and it bent right around . . . Like this was the track, it bent right around that. You come along there and hit it with a streetcar. It'd blow one of them green bugs off . . .

RIDGE: them little streetcars we used to have. I was down there at the depot; I was runnin' that Union Depot line then. I went down there at the depot, and we'd sit there 'til the train come in and get the passengers. And just as I got down there, somebody'd put two of 'em about that far apart -- maybe a little further. Anyhow, I hit the first one. It reared the front of this streetcar up like that, and I hit the second one. And, boy, it derailed me, throwed me right off the track over in that park like.

MP: You mentioned the Arcade. The old /Terminal/ Arcade building is still standing there at . . .

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: . . . between 8th and 9th and Wabash.

RIDGE: Well, now that used to be our station. Otherwise, all on the east side there . . . old Nicolai and old man Nash had offices along there in the back . . . from the alley up this way. Then Ed Nash had a cigar store there in front. Old man Beasley run it for a long time after . . . no, Beasley first run it, then Ed Nash bought Beasley out and took over. Now, Ed Nash used to be . . . of course, his daddy was superintendent there for years, and I think he was the oldest boy of ol' man Nash's. And he used to be trainmaster there for the old T.H.I. & E. /Terre Haute, Indianapolis and Eastern Traction Company/.

MP: Did both the streetcars and interurbans use that station, did they?

RIDGE: Yeah. Yeah. Because them interurbans went down 9th Street and pulled in there -- in the back there. At that time, across the alley now, there was our ticket office, what they called the ticket office where they sold tickets for these interurbans and bought tickets.

MP: Then it was also the station for the streetcars?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: And you reported to work there, did you?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, we all . . . well, down under this

RIDGE: arcade (of course, it's still there) there's a whole basement. That's a big basement down under there, and that's where us streetcar men used to meet to take out our runs when we was gonna go out. Now, we'd come down there of a morning. Of course, we all left out at the barn, but we'd come down of a morning and wait for what they'd call the "hobo" that used to come around. A car used to come around and pick us up and take us out there from the Arcade to the old car barn out east. And we used to wait down there 'til that streetcar come around and pick us up and load us on the car.

I know one time we was comin' in . . . or was it . . . lemme see . . . Yeah, we was a-comin' . . . No, we was goin' out. And the girl that worked in the office out there, she used to ride that hobo out there, too. And they was oh, 15 or 20 of us streetcar men on there, and she was on there, too. And the guy that was runnin' it got down there, and he didn't see this train. I guess it was kinda foggy or somethin' that morning, but he didn't see this engine switchin' there, and he pulled out on the track. And that engine hit that streetcar and turned it over on the side and skinned two or three of 'em up. This girl knocked one of the doors off. I think it was the back door that she tried to get out when she seen it was going to hit, /and knocked the door off, and she fell down there, and this door fell right on top of here. And, of course, it wasn't too heavy; it didn't hurt her bad, but . . .

MP: Where'd that happen, sir?

RIDGE: Right there at 9th and . . . or at, not 9th but . . .

MP: Eleventh?

RIDGE: . . . Wabash. Yeah, at . . .

MP: Eleventh and Wabash?

RIDGE: Eleventh and Wabash there, at that railroad crossing. /Note: the crossing is at 10th and Wabash.⁷

MP: That was the C. & E.I. crossing, wasn't it?

RIDGE: Yep. Now, they used to have watchmen, too, for them on them streetcars on every corner where a streetcar run across a railroad track. They had one down on 1st, and then they had the next one up there on Main Street. And /at/ ever' crossing there was a man that they called a guard. He'd stand out there and /when/ a streetcar'd pull up, why he had a flag /and/ he'd wave a flag for the streetcar to go on over if everything was in the clear. If there was a train coming or something, why he'd hold that streetcar there 'til the train got by and then wave him across.

Now, we had one down at 1st and Wabash, that little ol' railroad crossing down there. Then, we had one at 10th and Wabash. Then, one up . . . two up 13th -- two tracks up 13th. They had a guy that

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MP: That'd be the Pennsylvania tracks, wouldn't it?

RIDGE: Yeah. Yeah, they had . . . well, that was the law then, that they had to do that stuff.

MP: Well, there were a lot of railroads in Terre Haute at that time.

RIDGE: Oh, yeah.

MP: There was a lot of . . .

RIDGE: Yeah. There was a . . . up 6th Street, there was two up 6th Street. Used to be they had to keep watchmen, and they had to have two watchmen at each crossing.

MP: These were crossing watchmen.

RIDGE: Yeah. Yeah, just like a railroad crossing watchman.

MP: And they signalled the streetcars, did they?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they had a flag and they'd get out there. And when a streetcar came up, why he'd stop, and they'd get out there and take that flag and give him that, and he could go on across.

MP: Now, let me see if I've got this clear? You talk about these "hobo" cars. This hobo car pulled out of the Arcade . . .

RIDGE: Arcade, yeah.

MP: . . . which was at 8th and Wabash.

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: It was an empty car.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: And it made the run that took you streetcar employees . . .

RIDGE: To the car barn.

MP: . . . to the car barns on East Wabash.

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: So, from the car barns on East Wabash you all what? Got your streetcars?

RIDGE: We went out there to the barn and got our streetcars and took 'em out. They was . . .

MP: You began your run then?

RIDGE: Yeah, began to run right there.

MP: From there?

RIDGE: Yep. Yep.

MP: What . . . you talked about South 7th a couple of times. What were the heavily travelled streetcar routes?

RIDGE: Well, that was the heaviest streetcar route we had then.

MP: South 7th?

RIDGE: South 7th, yeah. You see it just run then down

RIDGE: there . . . that there lumberyard. /It/ used to be Fromme's. Fromme had a lumberyard down there at the railroad crossing. /August Fromme & Sons lumberyard was located on the east side of 7th Street at Hulman Street./

MP: Now it's Powell-Stephenson lumberyard. /This is incorrect. Fromme lumberyard was several blocks north of the present Powell-Stephenson lumberyard./

RIDGE: Yeah. That's Powell-Stephenson.

MP: And that was the end of the line? /Present location of Powell-Stephenson lumberyard was the end of the line./

RIDGE: That was the end of the line then. Yeah, that's as far as we went. Only, of course, the interurban went ahead. That interurban track went ahead down to Sullivan, but that was . . . streetcars never went . . .

MP: But that was a heavily travelled route -- South 7th Street?

RIDGE: Oh, yes.

MP: What about North 7th?

RIDGE: Huh?

MP: What about North 7th?

RIDGE: No. North 7th wasn't travelled so much.

MP: Was East Wabash a heavily travelled route?

RIDGE: Yeah, East Wabash was pretty heavily travelled.

MP: How far did the car run on East Wabash? Do you know?

RIDGE: Yeah, it run right out there to Highland Lawn, right on top of the hill there, just past where you . . . when you go into the graveyard.

MP: Um hm.

What was the main downtown streetcar stop?

RIDGE: Seventh and Wabash.

MP: Seventh and Wabash.

RIDGE: Yeah.

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

MP: Mr. Ridge, 7th and Wabash was the main downtown streetcar stop. That must have been a busy place.

RIDGE: It was busy. There was always a bunch of people standing out there waiting for different streetcars to come. You see North 13th and East Wabash, South 17th and South 7th, all come by there going out on their routes.

MP: I understand that 7th and Wabash during that period of time became known as the "Crossroads of the World."

RIDGE: That's right. Yep.

MP: What was downtown Terre Haute like in those days?

RIDGE: Oh, it was busy. There were people on the streets all the time and cars. You could see 'em coming in and out of them stores. Them stores were busy then. There was a lot of Jew stores there on the north side from 6th and Wabash on west, that they done a lot of business, too.

MP: With all those streetcars running downtown I take it there was some motor traffic cars and trucks. Was it pretty congested?

RIDGE: Yeah, it was. Yeah, you had to watch your business. Yeah, you could have an accident awfully easy if you didn't watch it.

MP. And during that period of time, I understand they had special policemen at 6th and Wabash and 7th . . .

RIDGE: Seventh and Wabash.

MP: What'd they do there -- direct traffic?

RIDGE: Yeah, directed traffic. That's what they did. Used to have one down there at 6th and Wabash -- ol' Bill Gleason. He used to always like for me to work down on that corner when I was inspector. We used to have to go down there and call these routes in the evening when the heaviest traffic was out there. Why, we'd . . . a man'd stand at 7th and Wabash and one at 6th and Wabash, and these cars would be coming pulling in. Why he'd call like "West Terre Haute," "North 6th Street," "South 3rd" car. And the people knowed what car they was gettin' on.

MP: The streetcars ran for a number of years in Terre Haute. I believe the last streetcar pulled into the old car barns in June of 1939.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: What were the heyday years? The peak years of the streetcars in Terre Haute, do you remember?

RIDGE: No. Back along in there they was busy all the time, and they used to ride, too. There used to be loads of 'em on the streetcars that'd go by the Arcade out there /on East Wabash just as full as they could be packed with people standin' up in the aisle.

MP: And how long did you work for the streetcar company?

RIDGE: Forty-five years.

MP: Well, actually the streetcars as such.

RIDGE: Oh, the streetcar. Well, I expect I worked between 10 and 15 years on the streetcars before I started workin' interurbans.

MP: All right. Now let's go from the streetcars. We've talked about the streetcars. Let's go now to the interurbans. How were they different from the streetcars?

RIDGE: Well, of course, they were bigger stuff; and they were an altogether different made car. They used to have a train . . . Well, we had two stock car trains. Two big motors that pulled the stock car.

RIDGE: Now, we got our heavy stock at Paris, Illinois. They always had a lot of stock from there. We'd pull out three and four cars out of Paris for Indianapolis. And Sullivan, we used to get some from Sullivan once in a while. We'd . . . that passenger car down there, if there was something on Sullivan line that needed to come to Terre Haute, why that passenger car would just couple on to it and bring it to Terre Haute like a load of stock or two loads of stock or . . .

MP: When you say, "stock" what are you . . .

RIDGE: That was cows, hogs, sheep . . . that was all that . . .

MP: These were special cars that these animals rode in?

RIDGE: Yeah. Made especial that . . . it had slats on the side about that wide between the slats and they could allow the air to get in there. You had to because they'd smother to death the way we used to load 'em up. But they had slats on each side of them.

MP: But they were then pulled by another interurban?

RIDGE: No, they was pulled by a motor. It was an interurban, yeah. But it wasn't built like an interurban. It was a big motor on that car there, and it was altogether a motor. Nothing but a . . . this car didn't have nothing on it but a motor. No passengers rode on it, only the conductor.

MP: So they had different types of interurbans. They had the stock car, what other kind?

RIDGE: Well, they had stock cars and they had the passenger cars.

MP: Freight?

RIDGE: Yeah, we had freight cars, too.

MP: And I take it you had a special car that pulled maintenance?

RIDGE: Oh yeah. Yeah.

MP: Let's talk about those passenger interurbans. How big were they, those cars, compared to the old streetcars?

RIDGE: Oh, they was a lot bigger than the streetcars. They was longer, had more seats in 'em, hauled more passengers.

MP: How many interurban lines out of Terre Haute?

RIDGE: Well, there was Indianapolis, Clinton, Paris, and Sullivan. That's all of them I guess.

MP: Four of them.

RIDGE: Yeah. Indianapolis.

MP: Which was the heavily traveled line?

RIDGE: Oh, that Indianapolis line was heavy travel, but you take, now, that Clinton route was a heavy route, too, because that was a coal miner town up through there. You come down through there from Clinton, you generally always had a big, standing load a-coming in from Clinton.

MP: Now, you worked on the interurbans then for, oh, 20, 30, how many years?

RIDGE: Oh, about 20 years.

MP: And what'd you do on the interurbans?

RIDGE: Well, I was conductor and I was a motorman both. But most of the time I was a conductor. I never pulled the front end too much on interurbans.

MP: So one of the differences between the old streetcars and the interurbans was the size. The interurbans . . .

RIDGE: Oh, yeah.

MP: . . . carried more. What were some other differences?

RIDGE: Well, they was more powerful. Them interurbans were more powerful in voltage than the streetcars was.

MP: Did they operate on the same principle -- a trolley line and tracks?

RIDGE: Yeah. They acted on the same principle, but their motors, the interurbans' motors, had more power in the motor.

MP: How fast did those cars run?

RIDGE: Oh . . . (chuckles) They'd get out, pick 'em up and set 'em down. We used to have a Highlander that run from Indianapolis to Terre Haute, backwards and forwards. And it run from Terre Haute to Indianapolis in 50 minutes. The time it left Terre Haute 'til it got to Indianapolis was 50 minutes.

MP: Non-stop?

RIDGE: No, didn't have very many stops. About, oh, about three stops from here to Indianapolis.

MP: That's moving pretty fast.

RIDGE: That's rollin' 'em.

MP: That's . . . that would even be a fast trip for today's car.

RIDGE: I know it, but it done it all right.

MP: What problems did you have with the interurbans out there on those streets?

RIDGE: Well, once in a while you'd have a wreck, but that'd be all.

Old George Jones was workin' /the/ Paris interurban and an old streetcar man . . . It was on that single track over there from where that Y is in there going to West Terre Haute (there used to be a single track from that on over to West Terre Haute). Of course, it went over that old route then, and 'ol . . . this old streetcar man, he pulled out . . . he didn't see . . . Now these lights . . . there was lights there where you pulled out, showed you whether it'd be red or green. If it was green, why you had the through way to go; if it was red, there was some- thin' a-coming. And old man Muggs got over there,

RIDGE: and he said the light was green. And he pulled up on that single track, and old George Jones was a comin' in over there with an interurban. And he got about half-way out there, why old George hit him /and/ killed him. Mashed him right up in that front end of that That was one of them green bugs -- the streetcar was -- and he was sittin' there, and it just mashed the front end right in on 'em. They got over there and got him out. But he told me when we was getting him out of there . . . we had to do a little cutting on that front -- that tin stuff -- to get it off of him because he was sitting right here in a seat like I'm a-sittin' and it just mashed right back on 'im. So, he told me when we was gettin' him out, he said, "Bill, I'm killed." I said, "Oh, no. You're gonna get along all right, Mugg." But he didn't. He died.

MP: And there were other accidents on the interurbans as well, I take it?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. We had one over there one time at the stock farm over east. There was one interurban going out and they used to have a dispatcher out there, and you took orders from that dispatcher, and you just run where the dispatcher told you to go and you stopped. You just sat there until the other car come. But some-way or other these guys got their orders mixed up. And they had a corpse in this car going from Terre Haute to Indianapolis, and they had another coming from Indianapolis run into it. And knocked the door open and this corpse fell out the side The coffin went out the side and turned over out there in the That cost the traction company a bunch of money, boy.

MP: Where'd that happen?

RIDGE: What?

MP: Where'd that happen?

RIDGE: Aaaah, about . . . over there on the other side of Seelyville, between Seelyville and Indianapolis /at/ the stock farm. The stock farm was about, oh, 10 mile, 15 mile on the other side of Seelyville over there.

MP: Do you remember when it happened? What year?

RIDGE: No, I couldn't remember that.

MP: Mr. Ridge, were there transfers on the interurbans like there was on the old streetcars?

RIDGE: Yeah. Yeah, they had transfers.

MP: If a person went from Terre Haute to Sullivan, could he go further south?

RIDGE: No. No. Not . . . just had transfers here in your city transmission. Otherwise, if you wanted . . . if you was getting off an interurban and wanted to ride a streetcar down South 7th or South 3rd or West Terre Haute, why he'd give you a transfer (the interurban would) and you'd get on there for nothing. Ride it free.

MP: But after you got to Sullivan, you could take another interurban, I take it, and go to Evansville or somewhere else?

RIDGE: Not our outfit. Now Indianapolis, they had other interurbans run in there from different places that would take you places but there was nothin' running out from Sullivan or Clinton or Paris.

MP: What'd it cost to ride an interurban?

RIDGE: Well, I don't remember just . . . the fare that . . . at West Terre Haute . . . from town here to West Terre Haute if you got on an interurban, it'd cost you . . . used to cost you . . . back in them days [it] used to cost you 15 cents to go . . . if you was on an interurban. And it cost you a nickel on a streetcar.

MP: It would be cheaper to ride the streetcar, wouldn't it?

RIDGE: Well, yeah.

MP: But the way the interurbans ran in the city of Terre Haute. For example, the interurban that ran from downtown Terre Haute to Indianapolis and to Sullivan and to Clinton and to Paris . . .

RIDGE: Yeah?

MP: Actually, there was kind of dual transportation in a way, was there not? If you didn't want to ride the streetcar or missed a streetcar, you hopped on the interurban. And would it stop? Let's say, for example, on South 7th Street. Would it stop at various places or once you got on the South 7th . . .

RIDGE: No. No. No, you didn't stop here in the city. If you got on an interurban -- a Sullivan interurban -- you'd ride out of the city down /to/ some of them stops down there out in the country route that they'd let off.

MP: But not in the city of Terre Haute?

RIDGE: No. No. They didn't.

MP: The interurban that ran to Clinton, according to a book written by Red Howell called Along the Line . . . this is the interurban to Clinton . . .

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: . . . from 13th and Lafayette to the city of Clinton there were 42 stops, and the stops were numbered.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: Stop 10, Stop 11, 12 -- do you remember that?

RIDGE: Yeah, 13, 14 . . .

MP: That was a lot of stops.

RIDGE: A lot of stops. Yeah.

MP: Where were the . . . the interurban station was located at the Arcade, was it not?

RIDGE. Arcade. Yep.

MP: And where was the maintenance done? Was it out at the old car barns, too?

RIDGE. You mean the one . . .

MP: The maintenance of the interurbans.

RIDGE: The ones that worked on 'em?

MP: Uh huh.

RIDGE: Yeah. They all were worked on out there. The interurbans pulled in there same as the streetcars did; and if they needed any work on them, we used to have an ol' guy that was a odometer winder out there. He finally ended up down here on Poplar Street. He had a radio shop down there. I can't think of his name now. He died down there on Poplar Street.

MP: The interurbans then and the streetcars were owned by the same company.

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, they was owned by the same company.

MP: So they shared the same facilities.

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: What about the crew on the interurbans?

RIDGE: What do you mean?

MP: You had a motorman and a conductor . . .

RIDGE: Conductor.

MP: Anybody else?

RIDGE: That was it.

MP: Just like the streetcars.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: The interurbans were designated by number, were they not? In other words . . .

RIDGE: Number on the cars?

MP: Yeah, the number on the cars, is that how they were known?

RIDGE: Yeah, they had numbers on the cars.

MP: They had numbers on the cars, and is that how they became known?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: What about the cars that were designated by name? In the book by Red Howell, Along the Line, he talks about the cars for a certain period there. I believe in the late 'twenties they had the name of Chauncey Rose Home and Wiley High School and Indiana State University, remember that?

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: Why were they called . . . why were they given names?

RIDGE: Well, they . . . that was a big name at that time. It was a big name at that time. Them guys that they named 'em for was pretty big men, and that's why they named them on that.

MP: And did the interurbans have the same problems as the streetcars so far as the operation -- problems with the snow, and weather?

RIDGE: Yeah. They had the same as we did. But, of course, them interurbans could get through that snow where the streetcars couldn't. They'd do a lot of breakin' it.

MP: What effect do you think the interurbans and the streetcars had on the development of Terre Haute?

RIDGE: I think they were good for the development of Terre Haute.

MP: In what way?

RIDGE: Well, there was a lot more business. At that time back in those days there wasn't everybody that had an automobile and lived out here . . . out of town, and they'd catch them interurbans and come to town to do their shopping. Then, /they'd catch one going back home.

MP: Again, that led to a busy downtown, didn't it?

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: I was going to ask you, what is your recollection of what Terre Haute was like. I think you said you arrived in Terre Haute in 1917?

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: What was Terre Haute like during the interurban era, as you knew it, from 1917 to 1931 when the last interurban ran on the Clinton line?

RIDGE: Well, there was good business here. We had good business, and there was a lot of people. You couldn't go down on Main Street but what the street was full of people. You always /would/ see a lot of people, and the stores were full of people.

I seen a guy killed there at 7th and Wabash one time. He used to ride with me on . . . I was working North 8th at that time, and he lived in that big white house right across the railroad track up there on North 6th Street. And he was a nice looking little guy and always dressed nice, and he'd get there of a morning and stand up and talk to me by the fare box in place of going back and sitting down, which I enjoyed his conversation. So, he rode down there one morning at 7th and Wabash. He said, "Bill, I'll see you in the morning." And got off. He started to cross down south on 7th Street, and an ol' machine gun started in blarin' and he fell there in the street. So ol' Rick, he run down there (he was a policeman that stood there on the corner with a semaphore) . . .

MP: What was his name?

RIDGE: Rickelman. Henry Rickelman. And ol' Henry, he run down there, and this guy wasn't dead yet; he was laying there in the street. And Rickelman said, "Who done it? Who done it?" He said to Rickelman, he said, "None of your business, you sonofabitch." He said, "the boys'll get him." And just laid there and died. (laughs)

MP: We talked a little about the stock interurbans, and we talked about the passenger interurbans, something about the freight. What kind of freight was hauled in those days? You had a freight interurban? An interurban to hold freight, too?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah, that was just a . . .

MP: Was that an interurban that took . . .

RIDGE: Well, it was a freight train, or a freight car that hauled all kinds of freight in from different places.

MP: And there was also a gravel car. Do you remember those?

RIDGE: Yeah. (laughs) I remember them. I was pullin' . . . or I wasn't a-pullin' it. I was on the back end of it. Me and Dewey Pflaging was takin' two up the hill there at Highland Lawn, was gonna take them up there for that interurban to pick 'em up and take 'em on out to Indianapolis or wherever they was gonna unload it. And we got stuck on that hill. It was frosty that morning, and the track was slick, and we got about halfway up the hill and got stuck and couldn't go any further. So ol' Dewey, he called the dispatcher; and there was an Indianapolis freight train just sittin' up there at the hill then just crawling out. So the dispatcher told the freight to come back down that hill (we was stuck with them two loads of gravel) and pull us up the hill. So, he come over that hill, and he didn't wanna come because he wanted to go on to Indianapolis. /He/ said he was going rabbit hunting that evening after he got to Indianapolis. And he come over that hill -- cut over the top of that hill-- and I told Dewey then, I said, "He's going to hit us sure as hell." We was down about the graveyard, along the graveyard there. He come over that hill, and he started to settin' brakes, and the smoke was just comin' outta that track like it was on fire. And he come down there and (clap of hands) smacked into us and broke the air pipes on our train. And I was scared to death. Of course, when this broke his air pipes, why it locked the brakes, which was good, the main thing that held us on the hill there. Because if we'd started back down that hill, hard tellin' what'd /have/ happened. They'd have killed everything behind us with them two heavy loads of gravel. And he broke . . . but he broke all the air pipes, so he didn't pull us up. They come out there and then with another car and fixed us up and fixed the brakes back on it.

MP: Now, you were on the gravel car?

RIDGE: Yeah, I was working on . . .

MP: What . . . what kind of a car was a gravel car?

RIDGE: Well, it was just big like a freight train with them there coal cars. It was just built like a coal car, only it was gravel in the place of coal in it. It had side wall that come up like that.

MP: What did you do with the gravel?

RIDGE: Well, put it out there . . . use it on track. Like they was repairing the tracks someplace, why they'd use that gravel, punch it in under them ties, keeping them blocked up and solid up where they'd . . . The switches, we used a lot on switches. These switches would get fouled up. Why they'd take and dig in under them and get gravel down there. /It/ would hold them solid.

MP: Was there a special crew that went ahead (also, this might apply to the streetcars) a special crew that went ahead once in a while on the tracks, as they did in the old railroad days, to see if the tracks were . . .

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah. There was a crew. Of course, there was a section crew. We had our own section then. We had a section crew here. There was an old colored fellow, I was trying to think of his name. Dick . . . hmmmm, I can't think of his other name now. But anyhow, he was a foreman on this track, and he had all white men or colored men. He had both kinds workin' on that track. But these colored guys didn't give him no trouble either. He used to call 'em niggers. Boy, he used to cuss 'em and call 'em niggers.

MP: Now, their job was to go ahead on the track to see if any of the track . . .

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: . . . was loose or . . .

RIDGE: The track . . . like you come here and there was a loose joint there, well, you'd dig that up, pull them spikes out of them ties, build it all up beneath the ties, get it all where you wanted it. And /you'd/ block your ties, or staple your ties back to your rail, and you'd have it.

MP: Did you know . . . well, you do know that funeral trains were another part of special service provided by the interurbans.

RIDGE: Funeral trains?

MP: Funeral trains.

RIDGE: That done what?

MP: Funeral trains were a part of a special service provided by the interurban company. In the book, Along the Line by Red Howell, he said that there were . . . the interurbans were chartered, I suppose, by the funeral home or the family to take . . .

RIDGE: The corpse to the graveyard?

MP: . . . to take a body to Highland Lawn cemetery or the old Woodlawn cemetery up on North 3rd Street.

RIDGE: Oh, yes. They used to haul . . . they used . . .

MP: Following the service in the home, family and friends followed the casket to the special car waiting in front of the house. After all who wished to go to the cemetery had boarded the interurban, it . . .

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: Do you remember that?

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: Did the interurbans run all night?

RIDGE: Oh, no. They was just like us; they just run 'til midnight.

MP: Do you think the interurbans would help us today in our transportation . . .

RIDGE: I sure do!

MP: . . . due to the energy problem?

RIDGE: If we had 'em back like they was then, they'd do a whole lot for commercial.

MP: Were they energy efficient?

RIDGE: What?

MP: Were they energy efficient?

RIDGE: Why sure it was, a lot better than what I got today. You could figure on . . . like an interurban, say you were going to Indianapolis and you was out there along the road someplace, and that interurban . . . you knowed what time that interurban was due in there at that stop. You could figure on -- unless something awful happened -- you could figure on three or four minutes' difference in the time that they were gettin' there.

MP: It was powered by electricity?

RIDGE: Yep.

MP: What led to the downfall, or demise of the streetcars and the interurbans?

RIDGE: Well, I don't know. I think to tell you the truth I don't know what caused them. They fought . . . they thought somebody had a big idea that thought they could bring these here buses and streetcars in here and take their place and do it cheaper. Well, they found out they couldn't do it after they got 'em in here.

MP: You . . . did you work for the bus company?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I put in . . . I put in about 10 years with this bus company when they come in here after . . . 'fore I could retire.

MP: So, you're career with transportation in Terre Haute . . .

RIDGE: That's right.

MP: . . . spans the old streetcars and the interurbans and then the first buses.

RIDGE: First buses, yeah. I pulled one of the first buses that ever was operated here in Terre Haute on

RIDGE: this South 25th Street line. There was a guy that had a bus down here; and, oh, he'd run it every hour or every two hours -- whatever he took a notion. Run from down here and take the people uptown. And the bus company bought him out when they come in here. He sold out to them and they took over. And I pulled the first bus down 25th Street to Hulman Street of the city lines that ever run down there.

MP: The first bus to operate in the city of Terre Haute was June 4th, 1939.

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: Do you remember what kind of day that was when the buses started running and there were no longer any more streetcars on the streets?

RIDGE: I sure do!

MP: What is your recollection of that day?

RIDGE: Well, they put a schedule on there when we first started these buses, a fast schedule that nobody in the world could ever make. And I told Dale Dubie (he was superintendent then), I told Dale Dubie, I said, "Dale, that schedule will never be run." I said, "I've done too much running the schedule and I know that it's too fast a schedule for them buses to ever make." So it didn't last but three or four days. They tore that up and made another schedule out for 'em to operate on.

MP: The buses . . . The bus routes were the same as the streetcar routes, were they not?

RIDGE: No. They was . . . some of them was, but they was different routed, the buses was.

MP: Could the buses go where the streetcars didn't?

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. Now, I had a . . . there used to be a run down South 9th. The bus come down Main Street and turned down South 9th. Went South 9th to 9th and Crawford. Then it turned there and went back over west . . . or over north . . . east I mean, and went down through there, down in Baghdad and in through there.

MP: What were those old first buses like here?

RIDGE: Aagh. We had some that was awful. I know we had one . . . I forget now. It had a name on it, but it was just built straight just like that wall on the sides, and it looked awful, and it was awful.

MP: How did the people accept the buses after all of those years with the streetcars and interurbans?

RIDGE: Well, they seemed to take 'em all right. Oh, once in a while you'd get a bellyacher squawking, but not very often. They got on there and paid their fare and . . .

MP: Was the first bus fare a nickel?

RIDGE: Yes, it started out as a nickel.

MP: And where was the first bus garage?

RIDGE: First bus garage -- let's see now. The first one we had with them was back there on . . . I believe that 9th Street route or barn was the first one we had. It was down there on 9th just before you get to Oak. Well, they finally made some kind of a factory in there after we went out of there, and I don't know what it was that they . . .

MP: Buses, to somebody who drove the old streetcars and you drove a bus, I take it . . . or I would ask you, driving the bus, was it as glamorous as running those streetcars and interurbans?

RIDGE: Oh, I never did like nothin' like I did the interurbans. I'd rather work on an interurban than anything and . . .

MP: Why?

RIDGE: Well, I don't know. It was just kinda fit right in. You'd get on there and you took out. If you was workin' the back end, you went through there and collected your fares up. And asked the passengers where they wanted off, let 'em off where they wanted off at . . .

MP: What happened to the old streetcar tracks?

RIDGE: There was a lot of it tore up. They tore a lot of it up, and there's a lot of it in that ground yet. Now, that Sullivan route down there, there's a lot of that track never has been tore up.

MP: Still visible today?

RIDGE: Some of it is, yeah. Now, down at Stop 13 on the Sullivan line here a couple years ago, I know a place down there that I used to go rabbit huntin' lots; and it was just . . . had growed up in bushes and weeds, but the track was just standing there same as it always was.

MP: Of course, in the city of Terre Haute most of the track has either been dug up or paved over.

RIDGE: Oh, yeah. There's a lot of it paved over, too. They paved over a lot of 'em. There's a lot of it dug up, too.

MP: Even today we still refer to the old interurban stops.

RIDGE: That's right. That's right.

MP: For a location -- Stop 13 or Stop 14. That's a carryover from the old interurban days when the stops were made. What . . . would the conductor . . . was it his job on the interurban to call out the stop? Was that it?

RIDGE: Yeah.

MP: How'd that work?

RIDGE: Well, he'd just go along up through there and call out stops . . . when he was coming to a stop like Stop 10, why he'd just call out on the interurban, "Stop 10, Stop 10." And if there was anybody that wanted off there, why they'd get up and get off.

MP: One thing I think I neglected to ask you about the streetcars when they were running in Terre Haute, how did the people board the streetcars? From the middle of the street?

RIDGE: No. The streetcar . . . oh, yeah, they walked

RIDGE: out from the sidewalk to the street where the track was going down there and get on it.

MP: Mr. Ridge, what other stories or anecdotes do you remember about the streetcars and the interurbans?

RIDGE: About what?

MP: What are . . . (laughs) are there any other memories you have about them -- little incidents that happened involving the streetcars and the interurbans? We talked about some accidents. Were there any other things that happened that you can remember? Any things humorous, any funny incidents?

RIDGE: (laughs) No. There's . . . it was always a pretty jolly life.

MP: You didn't have any shootings on the interurban like you had on the streetcar, did you?

RIDGE: No, never did. No.

MP: Was that the most exciting thing that ever happened to you, the shooting on the streetcar?

RIDGE: Well, it was pretty exciting right then at the time.

MP: Is there anything that we have missed? Not talked about that you recall? Something I've overlooked?

RIDGE: No, I don't think there is. I think we made . . . or covered about all of it.

MP: You think then the streetcars and the interurbans were an important part of the history of Terre Haute?

RIDGE: I sure do. Sure do. I believe they'd be yet today if they was here and operating like they used to operate. I think they'd have better service and people'd like to ride 'em better.

MP: Mr. Ridge, thank you very much for allowing me to come into your home, and I've enjoyed your recollections of the streetcar and interurban era.

RIDGE: Well, I've just enjoyed it, too. I'm glad you come down.

END OF TAPE

INDEX

Accidents, 14, 16-17, 27-28
Baghdad, 38
Bus garage, 39
Buses, 37-39
Calvary cemetery, 13
Car barn, 6-7, 19, 21, 30-31
Casey, Mike, 4-5
"Crossroads of the World," 23
Downtown, 23-24, 32-33
Dubie, Dale, 38
Funeral train, 36
Gleason, William W., 24
Highland Lawn cemetery, 13
Highlander, 27
Interurban, 3, 6, 14, 18,
24-37, 39-41
Nash, Ed, 18
Pflaging, Dewey, 34
Policemen, 23-24, 33
Railroads, 20
Rickelman, Henry, 33
Section crew, 35
Stops, 30, 40
Streetcars, 2-24, 29, 31-32,
40-41
Terminal Arcade, 18-19, 30
Terre Haute, Indianapolis &
Evansville Traction Company,
2-3, 18, 31
Transportation, 1-41
Wages, 3
Watchmen, crossing, 20